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COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT IN READINESS
OF STRATEGIC ARMY FORCES
Department of the Army B-146896

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D I G E S T



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WHY THE REVIEW WAS MADE

This is the third in a series of reports by the General Accounting Office (GAO) on the readiness of key commands within the general-purpose forces. GAO reported to the Congress on October 6, 1969, on 7th Army units in Europe and on June 30, 1970, on the Navy's Atlantic and 6th Fleets. Both reports are classified "Secret" and bear the number B-146964.

General-purpose forces are relied upon for military actions short of general nuclear war. They include most Army combat and combat-support forces, virtually all Navy units except the POLARIS fleet, all Marine Corps units, and tactical units of the Air Force. The Strategic Army Forces (STRAF), which are composed of 4-1/3 divisions, are to be constantly available to support national commitments. There is considerable congressional interest in the readiness of STRAF, and STRAF has been the subject of previous investigations by congressional committees.

GAO reviewed selected units of three of the 4-1/3 divisions which are designated as STRAF.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

It would be difficult for STRAF units to deploy quickly at full strength because many units are not combat ready. A considerable amount of maintenance support would be required to bring the essential combat and combat-support equipment to a fully ready condition. In the units reviewed by GAO, more than one third of the essential combat and combat-support equipment was unable to perform its primary mission. (See p. 8.)

--About 83 percent of the M-60 tanks available to units of two divisions had deficiencies which seriously impaired their ability to perform effectively. (See p. 10.)

--About 55 percent of the tracked vehicles inspected in another division were unable to perform their primary missions. (See p. 34.)

Adequate supply support was not available at battalion and division levels for promptly repairing equipment. GAO found that:

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- In the three divisions no stock was available of about 25 percent of the repair parts authorized for stockage. (See p. 20.)
- Requisitions for repair parts were not being prepared promptly, which caused an unfavorable supply position at the units. (See p. 23.)
- No follow-up actions were being taken on unfilled requisitions. (See p. 23.)

The high turnover of personnel, lack of qualified personnel, and funding restrictions, which were beyond the direct control of the divisions, prevented them from achieving and maintaining a high state of readiness. The divisions were being manned almost entirely with Vietnam returnees who had only a few months of service remaining and who did not have the skills or training most critically needed. This necessitated a continuous retraining program. (See p. 15.)

Readiness reports did not always contain accurate information which would permit command officials at division levels, and at the higher echelons, to adequately evaluate the readiness of the divisions. (See p. 26.)

RECOMMENDATIONS OR SUGGESTIONS

Since the manpower problems of the STRAF divisions are not likely to be remedied in the near future, GAO believes that the Army should consider some alternative means of protecting its substantial investment in the equipment assigned to STRAF units. The Army has been studying a plan for placing much of the equipment of these units in long-term protective storage and for retaining in use only those quantities which could be maintained effectively within anticipated manning levels. GAO believes that this plan offers distinct advantages to the Army and warrants further consideration. (See p. 13.)

GAO believes also that some restructuring of STRAF would help. Two approaches appear to be available.

- Reduce the size of STRAF to the number of divisions that could be equipped, manned, and supported with the resources available. Political considerations and international commitments could, of course, limit the extent to which this approach could be taken.
- Retain the 4-1/3 STRAF divisions but concentrate the available personnel in selected organizational components that would be kept fully ready. The remaining components could retain their identity and their basic equipment allowances under skeleton staffing and could be expanded with Reserves, if needed.

GAO suggested that these alternatives be considered in conjunction with the plan for long-term storage of equipment. (See p. 18.)

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GAO recommends that revisions be made in the criteria used in preparing readiness reports, to facilitate their uniform interpretation and to encourage more accurate reporting. (See p. 30.)

GAO recommends also that the divisions provide for closer supervision of requisitioning activities to increase supply effectiveness and readiness reporting to achieve greater accuracy. (See pp. 24 and 30.)

AGENCY ACTIONS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The Army concurred in the GAO findings. The Army stated that some funding restrictions had been lifted and that this had improved the availability of repair parts and should increase overall unit readiness. Additionally, the Army has adopted an early-release program for oversea returnees, which should reduce the high turnover of personnel within these units.

The Army informed GAO that the plan for placing equipment in long-term protective storage had been studied but had not been adopted, primarily because of constraints on personnel and funding. The Army, however, is improving its existing storage procedures and techniques to protect its investment in equipment.

GAO found, however, that the long-term storage plan had been considered only from the standpoint of whether the Army should adopt such a concept as a general policy. No definitive analysis was made of the costs or benefits relative to this or alternative plans.

In view of the enormous Army investment in equipment for STRAF and in view of the importance of STRAF as a key element of the national defense posture, GAO recommends that the Army make a thorough analysis of the costs and benefits of this plan and alternative plans. (See p. 14.)

With respect to the possibility of restructuring STRAF, the Army stated that strategic commitments did not permit a reduction in the number of units within STRAF. The Army is planning to test and evaluate several concepts involving the structure of STRAF in relation to the structure of the Reserves. The Army believes that these concepts, should they prove valid, may ease the personnel shortages which are expected to continue until at least fiscal year 1973.

Readiness-reporting guidance and criteria have been revised to facilitate uniform and accurate reporting. Additionally, commanders at all levels have been apprised of the supply-requisitioning problems, and they have initiated procedures which should provide for increased supervision of supply activities.

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MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE CONGRESS

This report is an independent evaluation of STRAF readiness that may be useful to the Congress when it considers the Defense authorization and appropriation requests.